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SUBJECT: MONTERREY HOSTS SUCCESSFUL HAGUE SEMINAR

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¶1. SUMMARY: On September 28-29, 2009, the U.S. Consulate General of Monterrey, the Tribunal Superior de Justicia of Nuevo Leon (State Supreme Court), and Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF), co-sponsored the Sixth International Seminar 'Mexico-U.S. Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.' The event in Monterrey was highly successful with over 150 Mexican and U.S. judges, prosecutors, child protection specialists, lawyers, law students and diplomats in attendance. This seminar, the sixth to be held in Mexico, was particularly relevant as both Mexico and the U.S. struggle to deal with the rising numbers of parental child abductions that in 2008 totaled 1,614 children. Regional news media covered the seminar extensively in newspaper articles and television reporting and interviewed speakers from the U.S. including staff from the Office of Children's Issues. The Tribunal and DIF were extremely pleased by the effectiveness of the seminar, and the Tribunal Executive Director stated that he is interested in planning future, joint events that focus on family law. END SUMMARY

¶2. The problem of international parental child abduction from the U.S. to Mexico is significant. During 2008, 1,614 children were reported to have been abducted or illicitly retained from the U.S., a thirty-seven percent increase over 2007 numbers. Although Mexico is a signatory to the Hague Convention On The Civil Aspects Of International Child Abduction, post's assessment of the handling of Hague cases in Monterrey's consular district suggests that there is a wide variance in understanding of and adherence to the provisions of the convention by Mexican authorities.

¶3. In an effort to educate GOM stakeholders on the convention, the consular section in Monterrey worked closely with Public Affairs Section staff in Embassy Mexico City and the Consulate General to develop a plan for a seminar on the Hague Convention for Mexican judges, prosecutors, child protection specialists, lawyers and law students. The Nuevo Leon state government agreed to co-sponsor the event and provided significant assistance.

¶4. Throughout the planning process Conoff and post public affairs staff met regularly with the designated representatives at the Tribunal and DIF. Conoff worked with the Office of Children's Issues to identify five speakers from relevant offices in the U.S. and one speaker from the Embassy who liaises with the Mexican Central Authority on child abductions. Post also took responsibility for the seminar program schedule and for inviting all speakers and moderators on the Program. The Tribunal provided the venue, graphic design work, and established a web site with seminar information and registration page. Both the Tribunal and DIF committed to inviting family judges and social case workers (about 60 people) to the seminar. Post also invited judges and DIF specialists from four neighboring states in the consular district: San Luis Potosi, Zacatecas, Coahuila and Tamaulipas as well as three ACS

officials from Ciudad Juarez and Nuevo Laredo. The target audience size for the seminar was between 100 to 120 people, but over 150 attended.

¶15. Attendees noted that the seminar was highly effective in explaining the Hague convention and how it applies to the types of abduction cases regularly encountered in Mexico. Many participants commented that the format of the seminar, with presentations on day one and round table discussions on hypothetical cases on day two, greatly enhanced the value of the event. The round table groups were intentionally mixed so that judges, child protection case workers, lawyers, diplomats, prosecutors and students were distributed evenly among the tables. This arrangement allowed participants gain a greater appreciation of the various perspectives involved in handling a Hague case. In addition, several Mexican participants commented that the contacts made through the seminar and the information provided by the presenters will yield dividends by improving the way in which these cases will be handled.

¶16. Press Coverage: The seminar was widely covered by local and regional news media. The event generated at least nine newspaper articles and one TV interview. In addition, Conoff gave two, five-minute radio interviews for shows in Zacatecas and San Luis Potosi the week preceding the seminar.

¶17. Lessons Learned: The Nuevo Leon Tribunal is a capable, reliable partner with adequate resources to carry out high-quality seminars. DIF Nuevo Leon was also very supportive, and both organizations delivered the numbers of promised participants. Despite the well-executed success of the seminar, more than six weeks lead time should be allotted to future, similar seminars. Final U.S. speaker commitments and funding were still not confirmed three weeks out from the seminar start date. Travel itineraries should be confirmed at least three weeks in advance of seminar, not one week. The invitations of

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law school professors with up to nine students were deeply appreciated. Holding a reception at the Consul General's residence the evening of the day the seminar closed was a wonderful way to thank the co-sponsors for all the work and cooperation that they provided.

¶18. COMMENT: Post is aware of U.S. couples who have been frustrated by delays and bureaucratic hurdles in adopting Mexican children through the Hague Convention mechanism for international adoptions. This may be a good, follow-on topic for future collaboration with our GOM partners. A seminar on this issue would be useful in clarifying adoption procedures between Mexico and the United States. END COMMENT
WILLIAMSON